

## Postcard of a Mural (at the International Museum of Surgical Science)

*After Gregorio Calvi di Bergolo's Early Amputation, 1953*

A white cloth, unbloodied, hangs on a hook  
in the background, but in the flatness  
of the mural it's also a sheet ghost  
hovering in the middle of the room.

When I see the postcard of the painting,  
the one I procured in Chicago ten years prior  
when I visited that surgical museum,  
it's immediately obvious why I bought it.

What did I tell myself that decade? What  
did twenty-one-year-old me think of the naked  
man, spread out on the surgery table, five other  
men holding him down like all the corners

of a star, his body stretched into religious  
agony, an allusion to some saint whose name  
I've now forgotten, but I could have told you  
then as a young art school aficionado,

could have listed every fresco by year  
from the 14th through 16th centuries, although  
now all those memories have been replaced.  
Paintings of hollow men replaced with touch.

I never sent the postcard. I kept it in a drawer  
pale as his face, his paling face, thrown back head:

how it could be confused for a signal of pleasure  
as the bone-saw carved right above his knee.

I think through all my lost knowledge of art,  
what ecstasy feels like in the mouth of a saint  
when it's mistaken for pain. Could you imagine  
being awake as eight hands hold you down,

then come two more to steady a serrated blade  
deep into your femur—you—overwhelmed by  
constellations of physical contact, the suffering  
of losing that part of you, maybe dying of infection

later because that's the decade you were born into,  
and the cloth isn't a ghost, and it wouldn't remain  
clean, but still it sees me through the ink, through  
the glaze of the postcard's surface, and I see it back.